

**Political History Collection  
Interview H.0000.03 : Tape 3**

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**Location of Interview:** Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region, China

**Date of Interview:** May 1993

**Language of Interview:** Tibetan

**Interviewed by:** Melvyn Goldstein and Tashi Tsering

**Name:** Setrong, Wangye [Tib. gser grong dbang rgyal]

**Gender:** Male

**Age:** circa 73

**Date of Birth:** circa 1920

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## **Abstract**

Setrong Wangye was a member of a rich shungyupa (government taxpayer) family [Tib. gshung rgyugs pa] in Tülung [Tib. stod lung] district. His family had large land holdings with its own miser [Tib. mi ser] and also held the position of Gyatso gembo [Tib. rgya mtsho rgan po] for the district. The interviewee discusses how he divided his land and farming implements among his bound peasants/serfs (Tib. miser). He describes his perspective on the land reforms that were postponed by the Chinese government. He also discussed why for his own safety he had to move to take a new job in Beijing. He finishes the interview with an excellent discussion of the estate and taxation system in traditional Tibet.

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## **Tape 3**

**A:** [continued from Tape 2] When they asked me what I wanted to do, I said, "When I first joined the revolution, I didn't request to get admitted to the revolution. Now I am going to adhere to the order from the Tibet Autonomous Region regarding curtailing the offices [due to the "Great Contraction" policy], but I am not going to make a choice from among the three options. I insisted on saying that. They said, "Your brother is not here so we can talk to him later, but what are you going to do?" I said, "Most probably, we two are the same, but you can ask him when he comes. As for myself, I don't have anything else to say." I neither told them that I am leaving, nor did I tell them that I am staying. I insisted on saying that. They said we will report this to the higher ups. They will report it to the Tibet Work Committee and its Branch in Lhasa. I said, "Please report wherever you want to." After a week I got a message saying you must come to Lhasa.

**Q:** At this time were you unhappy about this and did you have a feeling of mental burden because you had divided up your lands?

**A:** Yes. I was unhappy and I had a big mental burden. I had divided my land among the miser, so what should I do now? If my older brother would come back, I thought of going to India to do trading. If I would say that I am going to do trading, nobody would say anything. I had thought about that because I had to think about making my own living in the future. At that time, the house of the Administration Department had moved to Mang, so I went to the Lhasa Branch Work Committee riding my small motor bike.

**Q:** This Branch Work Committee belonged to the Lhasa municipality, right?

**A:** Yes. Now it is the Branch Work Committee of the suburban district [Ch. jiao qu], but at that time it was not that clear.

**Q:** The Work Committee was part of the Tibet Autonomous Region, right?

**A:** Yes. There was also the Lhoka and Shigatse Branch Work Committees. Then the Lhasa Work Committee said, "We have reported this to the Tibet Work Committee and [they said] it is okay for you not to return home." Actually, I didn't have a home to return to and they knew that. Then they said, "You are one of the people who wholeheartedly followed the Party. Nowadays, we know that in the society they hate people like you very much, but it is not 100% of the people who hate you. It is some people who didn't like the revolution who hate you. But this is dangerous. We, the CCP, will take the responsibility for your safety. We will gradually talk about what we should do. You are saying that you don't agree to make the choice and you said that you will do whatever the Party tells you to do. so we will make the arrangement. So don't worry."

**Q:** Was this leader Tibetan or Chinese?

**A:** He was the Chinese Secretary named Secretary Jia. He was a very nice leader and he regarded me and my older brother very

highly. He said, "For the time being, don't go all over the place. You should be very cautious. Last year, I gave you a gun, do you still have it?" I said that I have a gun. But I had a better brand, the new best quality German pistol called Sagchikha [?]. I showed them my pistol and I said, "If a person comes to harm me I will kill that person. I will never die alone." They laughed a lot at this. I had that pistol in my gown's pouch well prepared and ready to shoot. Then he [Jia] said, "Then it's okay, but be cautious." Then I went back to the countryside. [Answer not finished]

**Q:** Were you a party member at that time?

**A:** No.

**Q:** How much salary did they pay you?

**A:** They told me to join the Party many times, but I didn't. However, my salary was 279 dayan or so a month. At that time, County Section Leaders were at the 19th level in the wage scale and the Standing Section Leaders were at the 18th level of the wage scale. Since I was the Vice Director, I was at the 17th level.

**Q:** [Tashi Tsersing said] I was asked to be a teacher at the salary of 200 dayan, but I didn't go.

**A:** The Social Bureau also asked me to become a teacher at the Tibetan Cadre's School [Ch. zang gan xiao] and they said they would pay me 200 dayan. At that time, I was a county level cadre [ch xian ji].

While I was at the county, I again got a message saying to come to Lhasa right away. There they said, "We have investigated thoroughly and we found that if you stay in Lhasa, there is a little bit of danger."

[Trindor said: (not on the tape) There was even danger to students like me. The monks and soldiers would push us and throw stones, etc. and we had to run away. I entered [school] in 1957-58. One day Trijang Rinpoche came and scolded us for cutting our hair in the Chinese style (short hair).]

So they said to me, "How would it be if you went to China? Your brother is in China and when he returns let him stay in Lhasa and work for the Tibet Autonomous Region. We will completely take care of his security." I said, "That would be the best." Then they asked me, "Who are you going with?" I said, "I am going with my wife and kids and my younger brother who is in the Society School." They said that will be okay. Then they asked me where I want to go in China? I said, "I heard that a school will be opened in Xianyang, so please send me there." I was kidding and told them, "This time, I rode a bicycle when I came down here, but since the road is not that good, I fell several times and my leg got injured. So I am going to learn some politics in Xianyang. Bewcause my political [knowledge] is poor, I can't work well." Then they laughed and said, "You can go to Xianyang to be a teacher, but that will not do because you are a county level [cadre]. We will discuss this." The next day, I was called and told to go to the United Front Bureau [Tib. tong zhan bu]. At that time, probably Li Zuomin was the Department Chair of the Liaison Department [Ch. lian luo qu zhang] there. He spoke Tibetan like a Tibetan and asked me questions in detail and then he said, "You can't go to Xianyang as a student the way you want. If you go to Xianyang as a teacher, it is also not okay because your rank is county level. So it's better if you go to Beijing and work in the Nationalities Publishing House [Ch. min zu qu ban she]. You can also learn politics there." I said, "I am not familiar with this office." At this time, a person from there called Norgyela [Tib. nor rgyas lags] had come to Lhasa. He had requested that the Tibet Work Committee send 2-3 real Lhasa people. So I went to meet Norgyela and he said, "They have a lot of Khambas and Amdowas there, but these people didn't know the Lhasa dialect so that wasn't okay. So it would be very good if you could go." I said that will be okay and I said that I am going there with my family. He said, "That sounds great." At this time, many Chinese were returning to China.

**Q:** Many Tibetans were also sent back.

**A:** I heard that many of the Tibetans who were Party members also resigned and went back to their homes.

**Q:** Some of them went back voluntarily and some of them were sent back and some were sent to the school.

**A:** He [Li Zuomin?] said, "If you have other friends who hope to become cadres and want to go to China they can be sent to the Institute of Nationalities in Beijing [Tib. min zu xue yuan] or to Xianyang or to the Southwest Institute of Nationalities [Ch. xi nan min yuan]." I had 2 friends who wanted to go to China so I asked them. They said that they wanted to go and I reported this, but at the time when they were ready to leave they couldn't go because they had a wife and children. But all of my family went.

[Trindor: (not on the tape) At this time, no one wanted to go to China so sometimes they forced students to go by loading them onto trucks and sending them. This happened to my brother.]

**Q:** What year and month was that?

**A:** We left in vehicles in the middle of August 1957. When I arrived in Beijing, my older brother had also arrived there. He said that he was staying in a hotel and he came to see me. We stayed in the Dalai's Office [Ch. ban shi chu]. My wife and 2 daughters, Kelsang [Tib. skal bzang] and Yeshe Drolma [Tib. ye shes sgrol ma], and my younger brother were also there. My younger brother got a job in the Nationalities Publishing House. Everything was arranged and we were staying there happily. Then I told them what happened in Lhasa and we had to discuss in detail what our family should do and we also went to the hotel where my brother stayed and continued our discussion.

Now, I have to go back and continue what I told you yesterday. At that time, the my older brother said that we should divide our lands among the servants.

**Q:** When was that?

**A:** This was in 1956 in the 9-10th month. After the harvest we divided the land. My older brother got the idea for this when he was a representative of the area on the Preparatory Committee for the Tibet Autonomous Region when it was set up.

**Q:** By this area, do you mean the area under Tsede Dzong, right?

**A:** Yes. At the general meeting, there was a lot of talk, and the Panchen Lama gave a speech in which he said that we in Tashilunpo are going to start experimental land reforms. But no one from the Central Tibet, Ü, volunteered to do this. So my brother said, "In the Ü area if we could do that, it might be able to persuade the big Kudrak like Shatra [Tib. bshad sgra], Thönpa [Tib. thon pa], and Surkhang etc., who have over 100 dön each [to do this also]." Of course, they had over 100 dön. When people demolished the Surkhang house, they found that the house was very big. They got it by exploiting and oppressing people on their estate that had an area of 100 dön. Next to them, was the Thönpa house, which was also extremely big, like a monastery. We only had 8 and 1/3 tregang of land, but there weren't any other shungyupa like us.

**Q:** Was your 8 gang as same as the 4 dön of the Kudrak?

**A:** Yes. 8 gang was equal to 4 dön.

**Q:** I mean was the gang and the tregang the same with respect to the size of the land? Was your land of 8 tregang and the land of 4 dön that belonged to a small Kudrak the same in size?

**A:** It was supposed to be the same size. The branch of our household (the one that had separated) had 2 gang of land and one of our relatives also had 1 gang. My brother said, "How about doing the land reform first to lead the others. Why I am talking about leading [others] is that Ngabö said at the meeting, "As for us the Kudrak, or the Ngadag [large serf owners], it would be better to dismount the horse by ourselves rather than other people pulling you down."

**Q:** That was a very shrewd talk, saying that it would be better to dismount by yourself rather than others forcing you. [Laughter]

**A:** Comparing to the Ngadag, we didn't have much land, but for our area we had a large amount of land. My older brother was very open-minded and he understood the main points that were said at the meetings. So my brother said, "We have had those serfs serving us for generations and we have exploited them, so if we give them the land it will be good for politics and will be in accordance with religion. They are the right persons to be given the lands." When I asked my older brother if the miser could manage to plant all the land, he said, "There is no other choice, but to give them all the planting equipment with the land. And they won't have enough grain for their seed and their food, so we will give them grain as well."

**Q:** In 1956, before they said that at the meeting of the Tibet Autonomous Region, had you discussed that [reform]?

**A:** It was after the meeting when the two of us had joined the Administration Department that we had this discussion. At that time, only the Panchen Lama had said that they were going to do the experimental land reform on one of their estates. Nobody said that they will do it in Central Tibet, so we were saying that if we did that, the local (Tibetan) government might get angry and make us suffer. So what should we do? My older brother said, "There is no problem because there is a custom that the shungyupa can lease out our lands to the aristocratic estates, or the religious estates, or to traders. We can just say that since we became cadres, we can't do the farming, but we will take care of the taxes because we have the means to pay money or barley and we can also pay the wages for the pack animals and people [the corvée obligation that went with the land]. So we gave all the lands, farming implements and the plowing dzo and barley, etc. If the local (Tibetan) government asked how did you do that, we planned to say that we leased the lands to them for three years for 1 khe of lease fee (bawma) for 1 khe of land. And we fixed a price for all the implements and the plowing dzo and we will say that we sold them and they will pay us for them with barley gradually.

**Q:** Who would do the work for the taxes?

**A:** We two brothers would be responsible for the taxes, paying money or barley or whatever.

**Q:** That was coming out from your salaries?

**A:** No, because we were so rich we already had a lot grain and money.

**Q:** Did the miser households really pay the lease fee?

**A:** No, this was said just for show.

**Q:** At that time, did the two of you have thoughts of taking the lease fee and the fees for the implements?

**A:** We were thinking of taking as much as they could pay. If they couldn't pay, then we would let it go by. We were just supposed to suffer the loss. My brother said that at the most we could lose 3,000 khe of barley in three years. So at this time we had in hand over 10,000 khe of barley. So we could pay the money and the barley for the taxes. We thought if our miser could stand up on their own, they would become a model for all over Tibet.

So we gave land to all 12 households. As for the nangsen [house servants], there were like 2 or 3 or 4 nangsen who set up households, although I don't remember the number. So we also gave them land, barley and implements. We even provided them with pots because they had to set up a new household. All our miser totalled about 120 people. This was in 1956 when the County Administration Department was set up. Since we couldn't stay without any servants, we bought a good cart because we didn't have vehicles, but the motorable road was there so we had a cart driver who would go back and forth to Lhasa. We also had 1 cook, 2 babysitters, and 2 shepherds. We didn't give the sheep to the miser because there were 500-600 sheep whose lives had been spared long before that so we thought that if we gave them to the miser, they will slaughter them. We only bought meat from outside and we didn't kill any of the sheep.

**Q:** Were you allowed to shear the wool and milk from the spared sheep?

**A:** Yes. We cut the wool, but there was no custom of milking sheep, although we could have milked them. We also kept 2 shepherds and made the servants into employees and gave them tsamba and annual salary of from 8 to 12 khe of barley. The cart driver got 12 khe, the next got 10-8 khe, and we paid the babysitters something like 6-7 khe. We gave them the choice of staying or leaving.

**Q:** Did you continue to take the mibo (human lease) fees?

**A:** Yes. In one case we had a relative in Lhasa called Anan, the famous lame singer. She used to be a main member of our family, but later she got scattered and lived in Lhasa. She had two relatives who were girls and they had several siblings. Actually, they didn't need to pay us the human lease fee, but they told us that if they didn't pay the human lease fee they would be regarded as being without a lord and they were about to be put under the Agriculture Office [Tib. so nams las khungs]. So my late brother made a kind of certificate saying that they will pay us 1 or 2 sang [Tib. srang] as the human lease fee. Since then, when they showed this, Sertrong Yumey would become their lord [Tib. dpon khungs]. Actually, leave alone taking 1-2 srang from them, when they came with the human lease fee and also a leg of lamb and said thank you for giving us the permission to pay the human lease fee, we would give them a load of tsamba.

**Q:** Anan is related to you, right? She was lame, but she danced and sang the opera very well.

**A:** So like this, we divided up our land.

**A:** How did you divide the land? The nangsen didn't have any land and the treba had some land, right?

**A:** After we discussed the issue well at home, we called all the fathers and mothers [the heads] of the 12 households to a meeting and told their kids not to come. My late brother told them, "How about us giving you all our land? Do you want to plant it?" Some of the older miser said, "If we have to plant the land, we need plowing animals, seed and the food to be given to the hired people, so how can we do this?" We had prepared answers for this, so my older brother said, "We have already thought about this. As to how to divide the land among yourselves, you should discuss and decide among yourselves. You know the names and sizes of the fields and their quality, so you decide. If there are more people in a household, you can plant more and the ones with less people can plant less land and those in the middle can plant in the middle. We will also provide the seed, the plowing animals and fertilizers and the farming implements." The villagers were amazed at all this and they discussed with each other how they should divide the fields.

**Q:** This was for the 12 families or for every body?

**A:** For everybody.

**A:** So they discussed in detail about planting the fields and those with more people took about 100 khe of land. Those in the middle took 60-70 khe, and the smaller ones took 30-40 khe of land. They told us that so and so household took such and such amount of khe of land and they said that since we got the plowing animals and farming implements, there is no problem for working hard. We told them there was no tax for this, but you have to pay a lease fee which is 1 khe for 1 khe of land. We will do the taxes that the government requires from the land. We gave out 24-25 sets of plowing animals and divided them according to the size of the land received. And we also gave out about 30 or so plows of the highest quality and all the farming implements. And we gave them the barley in spring. We gave barley both for seed and for food for those who didn't have enough.

We also told them that this was for 3 years, but within that period, if the CCP said they were doing land reforms (in Tibet) then we would have to abide by their decision and their policy. There is no way for you to say that you have something else because it would be like the sky and the earth. Each dzo was valued at about 20 or 25 khe of barley and even the small things like the shovels were also given a valued like 1 dre. We told them that you should take in your harvest and from that pay us whatever amount you are able to and to let the rest go onto the next year.

When I met my brother in Beijing, we were talking about that. We never imagined such a change would take place. We were guessing that it won't take three years to do the democratic reforms. So we decided to leave it as it was agreed to for three years and keep quiet. Even if the [overall] reforms didn't take place within that time, we had already given out the land. The miser will know about the postponement of reforms. My older brother then returned to Lhasa. At this time, the miser had collected and brought the barley payments for the lease payment and the equipment to our house as much as they could and they said that later they will pay the part they couldn't pay then. I stayed in Beijing.

**Q:** Did they have to pay interest for the amount they were unable to pay?

**A:** No, we didn't take any. But there were some others taking interest.

**Q:** Did you give land to all the düjung, treba, and the nangsen?

**A:** Yes. It was given in accordance with how much land each household wanted.

**Q:** What was the yield like in your village?

**A:** In general, it was about 5 times (the seed sown). But we didn't measure the exact amount of seed sown. We would just count the number of sacks in which we put 3 khe of barley for placement in the storage cubicles where the barley was poured in from above. They would say that so and so storage area is full. These areas held 500 khe. A few of the fields which were farmed very well could also get 10 times, but most of the fields got 5 times. Actually, in that area, the land was not good due to the frequent frosts.

**Q:** Did you think that sooner or later there would definitely be [overall] reforms?

**A:** Not only did I think there will be reforms, but we thought it won't be postponed for 6 years. At that time, some people said that the reforms are being postponed for 6 years and then it will be postponed for 6 more years and after that 6 more years, so they would not be able to do the reforms.

**Q:** What was your basis for thinking that way?

**A:** At that time, to tell you the truth, I didn't know about that the Guomindang had 8,000,000 troops, but at that time, I heard that one of the war lords during the Northern Expedition [Tib. byang 'dul dmag 'khrug] had about 100,000 or 150,000, or 200,000 troops. Tibet didn't even have 10,000 troops. [Laughs]. So we were saying that the Kudrak of the local (Tibetan) government will know this and they won't plan to make war because it is clear that we couldn't handle them [the Chinese]. Even the great Chiang Kaishek who was the leader of the whole of China had to run away to Taiwan. Since all the 20-30 provinces in the motherland were liberated, how could they not liberate one province, Tibet. Furthermore, my late older brother went on a visiting tour in China and he saw a lot of about the power and the development of the CCP. Therefore, we thought that there would be no problem and the reforms would not be able to be postponed for 6 years. We had seen many movies where the CCP always won the victory. Some people said, "This is rubbish! How could they always win the war and the others always lose?" Then people like us told them that because they won the war, they could liberate the whole of China.

**Q:** What did you actually tell your miser about the reason for doing this reform?

**A:** I didn't tell them the reason. We just said that since we have become cadres now, we have no time to plant the land, so we are doing this.

**Q:** When you gave the land, did any of the taxpayer households say that they didn't want any more land? Or did some people take more land?

**A:** Of the 12 household, not one said they didn't want more land. A few said they wanted only a little more because they had quite a lot of land.

**Q:** How long did you stay in Beijing?

**A:** 1957-61. Four years. My older brother returned in 1957. Quite a long time after I arrived in Beijing, the Nationality Committee [Ch. min wei] held a meeting at which the Director Wang Feng gave a speech. He talked about the situation in the entire country and the international arena. He also talked about the situation in Tibet and said, "Nowadays, the offices have been curtailed and the reforms have been postponed for 6 years [answer not finished]"

**Q:** You were not in Beijing in 1956, right?

**A:** Yes. I came there in 1957. Wang Feng talked about curtailing the cadres and the offices. In this, some bad things happened but with respect to the long term future, some good things also happened. One good thing is all the Tibetan cadres who had joined the cadres not knowing the situation, will have resigned voluntarily. Some who had a clear understanding came back to the offices and became steadfast (cadres). So there is the hope that they will become good cadres for their whole life. For example, among the people in this meeting, there are some people who had moved to Beijing with their family.

**Q:** He meant that is you, right? [Laughter]

**A:** At that time, I could just understand a little bit of Chinese, so they had set up 2 interpreters for me. In the beginning, I didn't realize about that [he Wang Feng was referring to me] so I asked the interpreter, "Are there such people who came to Beijing like that?" The interpreter also felt kind of strange and said, "I wonder how that happened?" He also didn't realize that [it was me]. After we went back, he [the interpreter] said, "It must be you who moved with his family."

When I was in Tibet, Li Chuzhang told me how things in Tibetan were very clearly, saying, "This time, on the one hand, you were sent down here because the government needed you to work, and on the other hand, through the investigation done by the Branch Work Committee, we found that you were in danger although you always have a gun. Therefore, you were sent to inland [China] for your security. The CCP will take full responsibility for your brother's life when he goes back. Do not worry at all." That was correct. When my brother came back, I received a letter from him saying, "I was given a house and I was told to stay in Lhasa. I am the Secretary of the Civil Administration Department of the Tibet Autonomous Region. The Department head is Wangdüla and there is a Chinese cadre. There are only three cadres here." At that time, there were only 3-4 people in all the departments.

**Q:** When you look back, what do you think could have been done differently starting from 1951 that could have avoided the 1959 revolt?

**A:** It was possible to avoid the revolt because in the beginning, Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou accumulated the experiences of liberating so many provinces and made a brand new policy for Tibet. In the beginning, some people called it the 17-Point Agreement and some called it the 17-Point Treaty, but it was said we should not call it a treaty because Tibet was a part of China, right?

**Q:** Yes. It was indeed said that we should not call it treaty because it was not signed between two countries.

**A:** At that time, the Agreement was called as the agreement between the Central People's Government and the Tibet Local Government [answer not finished]

**Q:** This was said to be correct, right?

**A:** This 17-Point (Agreement) was correct. Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou, based on their experience liberating the inland motherland, advised that it would be better to liberate Tibet through peaceful means rather than through forceful liberation. And we should also liberate Tibet gradually at a time when they became conscious [of the need for reforms] through receiving advice. The 17-Point was signed for this purpose. At that time, it was strongly said among the cadres that we will not violate the Agreement. But the local government was outwardly complying and secretly violating it [Tib. mngon brtsi lkog 'gal] and the CCP told them many times that you shouldn't do that. If both sides really adhered to the agreement, the revolt could have been avoided. This was what I and my late older brother were thinking. They took a lot of Kudrak to China for tours to show their strength and convince them it was futile to fight against China. All of the thoughtful people didn't have thoughts of making war, but here [in Lhasa] it happened like that although I was not here. I think the revolt could have been avoided, but they didn't try to do that. This is like boy friends and girl friends; if one doesn't like the other then they won't get along. If both had agreed, then they will get along well. The local (Tibetan) government violated the 17-Point Agreement and launched the revolt. Nowadays, it is not at all okay to speak ill of the Dalai Lama, but at that time he was just in his twenties and he didn't have any political experience. He didn't even have the livelihood experience. So other people could make him do whatever they wanted [Tib. ga re bzos bzos red].

**Q:** In short, you are saying that it was done by the people around him, right?

**A:** Yes. So at that time, we divided the lands and we were apprehensive that the local government might say something [to us about doing that without their approval]. But later, leave alone saying anything, once when I came to Lhasa, it was being broadcasted from loudspeakers that Sertrong Yumey had done land reforms for the miser.

**Q:** I also heard that.

**Q:** When was that?

**A:** It was just after we divided the land in 1956.

**Q:** This was broadcasted by the Chinese, right?

**A:** Yes. But the local government didn't respond, for example by saying that this was wrong.

**Q:** Did the Panchen Lama ever do that experiment?

**A:** I heard that they did that, but it didn't work out.

**Q:** Where did they do the experiment?

**A:** The estate steward [Tib. shidü] of the estate where they did the experiment is in the Political Consultative Conference [Ch. zheng xie].

**Q:** Probably it was around the Lhatse [Tib. lha rtse], Ngamring [Tib. ngam ring], and Phüntsoling [Tib. phun tshogs gling], right?

**A:** No, it was not in that area. It was on this side. You can just ask him.... When my brother came back to Lhasa, we rented a house from Kündeling that was near the Taglungchang. After that, the house where they used to hold the Police Station [Ch. pai qu suo] in Khamdong Drokhang [Tib. kham sdong gro khang] was given to us by the [Chinese] government. At the time of the revolt, my older brother, his wife and three kids were taken to the Tibet Autonomous Region like the other progressive persons like Ngabö and they were entertained very well and kept there for their security.

**Q:** In 1965-57, did any Kudrak say that he was going to do reforms?

**A:** No.

**Q:** Ngabö had said that it would be better to dismount the horse voluntarily and so on, but Ngabö himself didn't do the reforms, right?

**A:** He was not able to do it completely. There was a problem [Tib. skyon] for the Panchen Lama and Ngabö because they would just give the orders to do the things on the estates but they were not able to go there in person. I heard that Ngabö made his servants in Kongpo very happy.

**Q:** I also heard that Ngabö's servants were very rich, though it might not be all of them.

**A:** I heard that most of them were, but he was not able to go to the place and give the [miser] farming implements and barley, etc.

**Q:** Anyway, he didn't do that, right?

**A:** Yes. None of the Kudrak did that. Just a few Kudrak stayed in the [Preparator COmmittee of the] of the Tibet Autonomous Region saying that they were progressives and finally they opposed the revolt [answer not finished]

**Q:** Tsendrön Gyentsen Phuntso La didn't have estates. He was a household member of Bumthang, but he got separated from there and he was patriotic from the beginning to the end, right?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** The monasteries and eligious estate also didn't do that [reforms], right?

**A:** None of the religious estates did reforms. Leave alone doing them, they opposed them, right?

**A:** Yes, they were also saying that the 17-Point Agreement was not acceptable.

[Note: The part below this is not on the tape so could not be checked and edited].

**Q:** First, tell me how you came to learn that they gave the equivalent of 2,000 khe of barley to the People's Association?

**A:** My older brother said don't join the Association, so I investigated a bit about what it was doing. Through this, I heard that Gyume had given them the 2,000 khe, but I had no proof of this. I just heard it. From my investigation, the people in the Association were not rich people. But at Mönlam they gave a lot of gye (alms). So I thought they have no big money, yet they are giving a lot of alms so where is this money coming from? When I asked around about this, I was told it came from Gyume College. Lukhangwa was the tsondzin advisor (Tib. gtso 'dzin) of Gyume college. For example, Loseling's tsondzin was Kalön Lama Temba Jayan. Lukhangwa definitely told Gyume to lend the People's Association the money.

**Q:** Tell us about the taxation structure.

**A:** The traditional government had shung ger chos sum ("the three: government, aristocrats, and religious entities"). The aristocratic and religious estates had miser who had to provide taxes [to them] and also to the Tibetan government. The aristocratic and religious estates had their land calculated in [a volume measure called] dön [Tib. 'don]. One dön = 2 gang [Tib. rkang]. The shungyupa calculated their [land and] taxes in gang. Because of this, the aristocratic and religious estates had a concession of 50%.

**Q:** How many sönkhe of seed [Tib. son khal] [the amount of seed that could be planted on an areea] were in a gang?

**A:** Every area was somewhat different. But after the singdru (uprising) we did research and found out that in general 1 gang had 60 sönkhe of seed and one dön had 120 sönkhe of seed. I worked as a Gyatso gembo. At this time I had 1 gang and it had 60 or so sönke.

**Q:** Was the government's gang the same as the gang that aristocratic and religious estates gave to their miser?

**A:** No. There was a big difference between these. For example, Kundeling had an estate called Gyadö estate. Then at Santsam there was also a Kundeling estate. Gyadö estate had 7 gang and 11 miser households. Each of these households had only about 10 sönke of land.

There were two kinds of taxes: the chitre or "outside tax" [Tib. phyi khral] and the nangtre or "inside tax" (Tib. [nang khral]). Nangtre involved doing ula (corvée labor) for the gang (of land) one held. The chitre had two kinds of obligations: gangdro langdön (Tib. rkang 'gro lag 'don). Gangdro involved sending people and carrying animals as a corvée tax. Langdön involved giving things in-kind. In Tülung Dechen district (which used to be called Tsede district) there were 61 gang of land. If 100 carrying animals had to be sent [as a corvée tax], then each gang had to provide less than 2 animals. We calculated this using the unit phud: 1 gang = 6 phud. And 6 phud = 1 tre, and 20 tre = one khe. This is how we calculated the amount of animals that had to be provided. This was called chandre [Tib. cha 'brel].

We used the system of diu calculations to calculate things. It was difficult to divide up the obligations for each household when they had uneven gang like 2/3rd of a gang. Most taxpayer serfs of aristocratic and monastic estates didn't have a full gang. They had only half a gang or an uneven number. I was a shungyupa. We first had 9.33 tregang (taxable gang) and then one section of our household split so we had 8.33 tregang. Our shungyupa gang was slightly larger than the gang of aristocratic and monastic estates. But between us and the lords, there was no comparison, as they had 60 dön, etc.

In my family situation, we had 12 miser households under us. They only did nangtre, not chitre. If they had to be sent for chitre, we would provide them complete food (butter, tsamba, tea and meat). The miser of aristocratic and monastic estates were liable for nangtre. They also had some leased fields from us.

**Q:** When your miser were doing corvée farm work on your fields was this called gangdro?

**A:** In general it wasn't. It was called nangtre.

**Q:** If a Kundeling miser works on his lord's land what is that called?

**A:** It is called nangtre. They had to do nangtre and chitre.

**Q:** What kind of work did they do for nangtre?

**A:** It was work on the estate. Chitre was for taxes that go outside the estate to the government.

**Q:** What kinds of chitre were there?

**A:** Many kinds. There was a saying in the old society that chitre is like the hairs on ones head or the ripples on water [many with no end] [Tib. skra gangs chu snyer lta bu'i khral rigs]. So after democratic reforms, when the people were doing thamdzin (struggle sessions), they would say you made us go on and do all kinds of miscellaneous taxes. But in actuality, these were based on their having a treden or tax basis (Tib. khral rten) on which these obligations were based. So the lords couldn't just say to anyone walking on the road "do taxes." There was a tax basis.

**Q:** Could there be differences such as Kundeling making a tregang equal to 10 sönkhe and Surkhang making one equal to 20 sönkhe?

**A:** Yes there could. For example, for my miser, 12 sönkhe = one tregang. And they only did nangtre. But aristocratic and religious estates gave only 10 or so sönkhe, but they made the miser do nangtre and chitre.

**Q:** Were there separate Kundeling miser for the nangtre and chitre?

**A:** No. All (the miser) had to do both. Let me give you an example. If we had to do the corvée tax called tau kheema (sending carrying animals and people to go with the carrying animals) [Tib. rta'u khal ma], then my brother and I decided who to send and we gave them food. But on aristocratic and religious estates, for each 7 gang there was a gembo or headman [Tib. rgan po] and the gembo divided the tax obligations among the miser. When these miser went to provide this obligation, they didn't get food. For these taxes, the estate steward didn't have to do anything. The gembo did this.

**Q:** If Kundeling is told by the government to give 100 khe of grain, who gave this, the miser?

**A:** This kind of langdön tax in-kind would be given by the labrang itself. It was not collected from the miser. As to the provision of soldiers asa tax, there was the system called shidraag gandro langdön [Tib. shi drag rkang 'gro lag 'don]. If Kundeling had to send such a soldier, the labrang would pay for hiring the soldier, not the miser.

**Q:** Did miser give skins, etc. as chitre?

**A:** No. [The lord did]. The miser did not have to give the taxes in-kind as chitre. But estates were often leased out. Changngöba had an estate of about 4 dön. It had a headman. The gembo or headman did all the work of ordering the corvée animal carrying tax, not the estate steward. There were both miser and servants there.

**Q:** What was the shabden phashi--I heard it had no taxes.

**A:** Yes. The government had chagjen shi (Tib. chag chen bzhi)("the 4 big exemptions"). [These were]: (1) For all aristocratic officials (Tib. drung 'khor) there was a one dön tax exemption. If the official died and had no [male] heirs, then they have to perform the tax for that dön [until they got another official]. In Tülung there was the Drabu estate and the Seshing estate. The Drabu estate was held by a monk official. When the monk official died, he had 3 sisters. So there was no one to serve as a government official. So the estate was taken back [by the government] and given to Kundeling Dzasa Öse Gyentsen.

The Seshing estate was held by someone called Pemala. He tried a lot to become a government official, but was unsuccessful, so they gave the estate to Yabshi Taktse [the 14th Dakai Lama's family]. There was also Gyada shiga in Tülung. It was held in 13th Dalai Lama's time by an artisan called Chemo gamala. Then that family line was unable to do government official service so the government took it back and gave it to Dzasa Gyada.

**Q:** What happens if a Kudrak has 4 estates and then has no one to serve as a government official (Tib. shabdödpa)?

**A:** The one dön exemption will be lost. If it is a small aristocratic estate and an old one, the government could take it back, but this was rare. The government could take back the shabdö pashi (the estate from which an government official has to be provided), but usually not the others. There was also the custom of paying a dö or substitute fee [Tib. dod] for the missing official until they got one. If they did that then they wouldn't lose the estate. For the small Kudrak families with just a few dön, it was easy for the government to take back estates, but for the big Kudrak with over 100 dön the government couldn't do much about them.

**Q:** Could an aristocrat sell his estates?

**A:** Yes they could, but they had to do it quietly (inconspicuously). If they did it openly, then people will insult him saying he sold an estate because he couldn't manage his affairs well. It would be considered a very negative thing.

**Q:** What happens if a Kudrak sells his estate to a non-Kudrak?

**A:** This basically isn't done. If it did happen, then they would do nang zhugs (internally to a friend quietly) or not say openly it is sold, but say it was leased.

**Q:** Is it legally allowed to sell an estate?

**A:** From my own experience, I don't know of an estate having been sold. But I also never heard of a rule that said that it isn't allowed to sell an estate. But I never heard of an example of a sale either.

**Q:** What about the case of Trimön selling or giving an estate to Kundeling in exchange for Kundeling giving support to him and his wife [while alive and] even after he died?

**A:** Yes. That's right. He did that. But I heard he didn't sell it really. Trimön gave all his estates to Kundeling and Kundeling would provide all the food for Trimön his wife and about 8 servants (10 in all).

**Q:** After Trimön died, did the estates revert back to Trimön?

**A:** I'm not sure, but I do not think they were permanently lost. I think it was only for the duration of his life, not permanently.

**Q:** What about this. If Surkhang, who had many estates, gave one to a younger brother, would this be okay?

**A:** Yes. There would be no problem with this. Shatra Ganden Penjor and his sister Lhayönla has a dispute during Reting's time and split up. She used a Khamba trader called Gondrenla to petition Reting. All the files on this dispute are in the archives office. I have seen them. The government divided the estates in the following way: Shatra Ganden Penjor got the most estates and became the main Shatra family, while Lhayönla became Shasur and got less estates than him. She got roughly what the previous



Mrs. Shatra had gotten in amount when she split.

**Q:** There were some rich Khambas in the old society like Pandatsang and Sandutsang. Did they have estates?

**A:** No. When I think about it now, if it was okay to sell estates, then probably some of the Kudraks would have openly sold some to them, so it probably it wasn't all right.

**Q:** How did Panda Yambe and Sandu Rinchen become Kudrak and government officials or Shungshab [Tib. gzhung zhabs]?

**A:** Yambe did wool trading selling wool for the government and did so well in generating profit that as a reward he was made a government official.

**Q:** Would Panda Yambe's kids automatically become Kudrak also?

**A:** No they wouldn't. To be a Kudrak you need an estate.

**Q:** How did Sandu Rinchen become a Kudrak?

**A:** His wife was a relative of Reting, so this was how he got it--through his wife. For example, there was a person called Gyada Dzasa, who was a monk official. He received Gyada estate, so that his descendants would become Kudrak. Consequently, he had the estate "basis" for being a Kudrak. This estate was called a thabten phashi estate. However, his kids didn't turn out, so they didn't become Kudrak. But the Yabshi [families] were special in that they [automatically] became Kudrak.

**Q:** If a Kudrak got an estate, he also got the estate's miser, but in your situation as a miser having his own miser, how did that originate?

**A:** In the old society the government did land "land settlements" (re-surveys of land) concerning taxes. But these were not able to be implemented well. The 9th, 10th, and 11th [Dalai Lamas] didn't live long, so things weren't implemented well during this period. Then during the era of the 10th Dalai Lama, when Tshomöling was regent, in about 1830, there was the Jagta shibjung re-survey [Tib. lcags stag zhib gzhung]. My household was a shungyupa taxpayer serf family that held one tregang and was well off. But around us, there were other shungyupa, about 5 households, who were unable to handle the tax basis fields they held and they were virtually extinct at this time and couldn't pay the taxes. So at the time of the Jagta shibjung, my family was given their land and their tax obligations. So we ended up with 8 and 1/3rd tregang or tax fields. Actually we had about 13 tregang, but afterwards our family divided and the other side of the family got 1/3rd of this so we ended with 8.33 tregang. They gave us the land and also the miser. In other words, the shungyupa taxpayer families who couldn't manage their taxes were given to them as their miser (serfs). The Jagtag shibjung specified all this--it is still in the archives.

**Q:** Does the shibjung document say you got land and people in Upper Khyumolung?

**A:** Yes. They were all shungyupa taxpayer serfs at that time. They were still called shungyupa afterwards, but really internally they were our miser. The 4 main taxes were: two were to do the civil and military tax [for the gyajong magar (regiment)]. This was called shidrag tre [Tib. zhidrag khral (civil = zhi; military = drag)].

Another two were the tongnying trücha [Tib. stong rnying 'khrus chag]. In the past, the government asked what should be done with treba (taxpayer families) who became extinct (Tib. stong pa). With regard to this old land which had become extinct [the prior family no longer held the land and the tax], then we said will pay the tax for these extinct people in the future. They washed [Tib. khrus] a deity in water and drank it while taking an oath that they will do the past taxes.

The 4th was jagyö shibjung [Tib. ljags yos zhib jung]. This was the time that they re-examined and revised the jagta shibjung. They revised the number of gang they had. It had actually been examined several times. All the records of this are in the archives.

**Q:** Tell me about the rights of a lord with regard to his miser, e.g., mibo or "human lease" status [Tib. mi bogs], or mitrû "human release" [Tib. mi 'khrol], and mije or "person exchange" [Tib. mi brjes]. Also about the rights of the miser.

**A:** If you are the miser (bound subject/serf) of an aristocrat, all the power and authority is in the hands of the aristocrat. It is the same if you are the miser of a religious estate. There the authority lies with the monastery. For example, if a miser wants to change to another estate, he has to ask his lord to give him human lease status and permission to go. If he receives that, he will pay his human lease fee to his lord [annually] and be allowed to go. Now as for mitrû or human release, this was mostly when I wanted to make my son a monk so I asked my lord and he would give me a type of mitrû called chötrö [Tib. chos 'khrol] (permission to leave the estate and become a monk). It was mostly used in these cases. Another kind of mitrû is a person who says I am going to seek another lord, so give me mitrû. This was easy for shungyupa, but very difficult for aristocratic and monastic miser. It was a little easier for shungyupa to ask for this. However, if one gets chötrö and then later leaves the monastery, he reverts to be a miser of his original lord. This right of lords was called "skya rtsa rang bdag."

**Q:** [Tashi Tsering says] On aristocratic and monastic estates was there was a custom of giving male and female servants back and forth? Phala Thubjen Ongbo had an estate in Gungpothang (east of Ihasa). There was a foreman for the estate. His name was Drebu yugpa. He was given to Tseja Gyentsen la as a gift.

**A:** Yes, there was a custom like this. For example, if I have a miser and if I give him/her to another household, the decision over this is mine. The reason for this is that I do the miser's tax, so the government doesn't interfere since I do the tax. However, in my lifetime, we never did this with a miser, but we had the right to do so if we liked. This custom is also done with shungyupa. This giving [of miser] is sometimes done to pay a debt. For example, at Drelung's Chutsen there was an aristocrat called Bugjung. He had a female servant. She lived there sort of paying him "human lease" fee, but also sometimes serving as a servant. Sometimes she also worked as a servant for Wangye la. He owed Namgye Tratsang [monastery] 40 khe of grain and told her if you pay the 40

khe of grain then you no longer have to serve me. She told me that, and I told her that I'll pay the 40 khe of grain and then you will become my servant. She agreed and became my miser. She became my servant.

**Q:** Was she a treba, trenyog, or nansen?

**A:** She was like a nangsen.

**Q:** How did one become a nangsen?

**A:** One way is that the parents of a miser under you die leaving children and then the children can't earn their livelihood so the lord keeps them and feed them and they become his nangsen. Another way I myself saw, was that 2 brothers in a household don't get along and the younger brother comes to me and says I can't get along with my older brother so please take me as your nangsen. This happened to me. A third type was from runaway miser who were like beggars who come and work as a dūjung and then can't manage and ask me to please make them a nangsen.

**Q:** Is there any real difference between a yogpo or servant [Tib. g.yog po] and a nangsen?

**A:** They were basically the same, but after democratic reforms, the communists said the nangsen had no rights over their body [Tib. rang lus rang dbang med pa] and didn't have enough to eat [Tib. ldod grod pa mi rgyags pa]. But I think it was only a small minority who didn't have enough food to fill their stomachs. I paid mine 18 khe of grain per year. They had leftover grain which they sold. And on top of that, we gave them a set of clothes once a year.

**Q:** Aren't nangsen more like a trenyog, since a nangsen's kid of same sex becomes your nangsen?

**A:** That isn't certain. It might become a nangsen or perhaps the couple and kid would say they want to be dūjung, and would leave being a nangsen.

**Q:** If they say they want to be dūjung, could you say they couldn't?

**A:** We would say yes, because we generally had to give the kid some grain as well as it will get older [eat more], so it was better for us to have him as a dūjung since we didn't have to give food to the kid.

**Q:** [Tashi Tsering says] I think there is a difference between yogpo and trenyog in that the people who come for 3 months work in Fall and Spring [Tib. tönyog and jiyog] and then leave, so they are not like nangsen [who stay all the time].

**A:** No. The difference in that case is between a hired hand or laba [Tib. gla pa] and a trenyog [Tib. bran g.yog] (servant who is one's miser). The hired hands come in Fall and all leave on Ganden Ngamju [25th of 10th month]. There is a saying about this:

dga' ldan lnga mchod

thog kha'i rtse la yod

thug pa bag thug khog ma'i gting la yod/

g.yog po'i nyal chas skas 'dzags 'og la yod.

At Ganden ngamjō, there are [lamps] on the roof

Gruel soup [served on that day] is in the pot,

and the yogpo's bedding is under the stairs (i.e, the gla pa are ready to go). A trenyog, is one's own miser. A laba isn't.

I recall that Lhalu had a miser named Kesang who was a good tailor. He gave him to Kalön Lama Temba Jayan. Also, Shatra Ganden Penjor had a good cook called Lodrö who he also gave to Temba Jayan. So if a person is your miser you can give him or her to someone else. Since Temba Jayan was a [powerful] monk official, he didn't have any miser, so getting miser like this was useful to him.

**Q:** You said you got a trenyog named Yangjen. Did you and the old lord leave a written agreement concerning this?

**A:** Yes. We had made a written tröldzin [Tib. 'khrol 'dzin] (release document).

**Q:** What did the tröldzin say?

**A:** For example, Shatra's serf (Tib. mitsa [mi rtsa]) Lodrö from now on has been given to Temba Jayan and he is his owner [Tib. khong la bdag pa red].

**Q:** Who gets the document?

**A:** The miser doesn't. Temba Jayan would get it.

**Q:** In a case like Lodrö, who would his kids belong to?

**A:** The kids also would belong to Temba Jayan. Once he had the tröldzin, Shatra could say nothing later own that the kids were his. In my own example, I didn't get a tröldzin; only a verbal agreement. That servant's kids also became my miser as were their

kids.

**Q:** If you had a treba with a lot of kids, did you have the authority to give one to another person?

**A:** It would not be easy. First, I would need the agreement of the mother and father. And if I gave him by force without their permission, it could cause trouble later. If I gave the kid to another lord and the kids then fled, it would be a big problem, so this kind of action would not be easily accomplished. In the old society there was the Sonam leygung or Agricultural Office. From its name it was the one in charge of Tibetan agriculture and farmers, but really it was dealing with peasants who had run away and had come to Lhasa without any lord. It was in charge of them. It didn't handle agriculture, but was for the runaways with no lord.

**Q:** Weren't there miser who left their lord and put themselves under the Dzubug office [Dalai Lama's treasury]?

**A:** There were, but these were few. Unless you had a very good reason, they wouldn't agree to accept you as their miser.

**Q:** Was the name trenyog used in the old society or was it a creation of the new [socialist] society?

**A:** It was an old society name that appeared in old documents.

**Q:** If it is an old society name, what is the different between treba, düjung, nangsen, and trenyog?

**A:** They are separate. If a person was a treba he would say he is a treba (taxpayer serf, i.e. he had land), and is not a trenyog. If it is a düjung. He also wouldn't refer to himself as trenyog.

**Q:** Then what about nangsen and trenyog?

**A:** The nangsen would say that they were threnyog. All the miser under me could be called threnyog, but all couldn't be called nangsen. But in the old society, the term threnyog wasn't really used much--mostly people said yogpo and yogmo (male and female servant).

**Q:** What is the difference between yogpo and nangsen?

**A:** We didn't say nangsen in addressing them. We said Simponla. One would say I am Surkhang's yogpo, not trenyog. (Tashi Tsering said) sometimes nangsen meant a higher servant who stayed near the lord. Tashi said trenyog and yogpo is same. But there are no set rules--there were treba, düjung and trenyog--3 kinds of miser.

**Q:** Is there a difference in rank between aristocratic and religious estates?

**A:** No, they are same. Between shungyupa and gerba (aristocrats), the shungyupa have land in gang and the gerba have it in dön. The Chüshi or religious estate miser are given a little land and had taxes and had a hard time. There were the chag chen bzhi and the che btsan bdun [monasteries]. The latter included the seven: Sendregasum, Gyudö, Gyume, Namgye tratsang and Neyjung. Most of Tibet's other monasteries were under these 7 monasteries.

**Q:** Did aristocratic and religious estates have to do chitre?

**A:** Yes. But since they had the dön land unit, they only did half of what we did (since 1 dön = 2 gang).

**Q:** Is dön and gang tax same?

**A:** Two gang's tax (field) and one dön's tax (field) are same size, but the tax is half for dön. During 13th Dalai Lama's time, he made a new military tax saying that from 4 dön, one [more] soldier [had to be provided] and from 8 gang, one soldier had to be sent. This tax was equal. Otherwise aristocratic and religious estates had half of the tax.

**Q:** How were the nomads' tax done?

**A:** It was different. It was done by gotsi or "calculating the heads" [Tib. mgo rtsis]. Each 20 animals was considered to be one gotsi. This was the custom of nomads of northern Tibet [Tib. byang 'brog pa].

**Q:** What was the system of kyeme shime [Tib. skye med shi med] in northern Tibet?

**A:** This wasn't a tax exactly. If I give you a dri (female yak) [Tib. 'bri] to look after you have to give me back two khe of butter [14 gyama]. For example, we got 20 dri a long time ago from the Laja office, so we pay them every year for these. We have to bring them 40 khe of butter every year at Mönlam. In this system, if the female yaks increase in numbers, it is profit (for the recipient). If they decrease in numbers, it is a loss. In general, the government used kyeme shime, but private people used kyeyö shiyü [Tib. skye yod shi yod].[the tax varies depending on the actual number of female yak each year]

If I had 20 dri, I would discuss this with a household and give them the 20 dri. Then I would go in fall to see how many calves have been born. For each one born, they had to give 2.5 khe of butter [for that dri]. Then those dri with 2 year old calves gave 2 khe of butter. Those with no births, gave none. We also have to put a seal on the horns of the new babies. This was called ra tham (hirth seal). Then when the 2 year old calves becomes 3 years old, we will delete them from the list having to give butter. If the animal dies [before that], they have to show us the horn with the seal on it as proof they are not lying.

**Q:** What about mitsa yulgug [Tib. mi rtsa yul bkug]?

**A:** To do this you need to have had a gaten [Tib. bka' bstan or rten] or edict from the government giving you this right [to catch and return runaway serfs]. Aristocratic and religious estates all had this gaten.

There were two kinds of nomad taxes, the lebtsi [Tib. leb rtsi] and gotsi [Tib. mgo rtsi]. These were mentioned in old documents. Gotsi was done in Nagchuka every three years as an animal head count (a census). The other is called lebtsi. In this system, 20 nor = one gang. [Goldstein: this triennial census was to assess each family's number of gang and thus their taxes and pasture allocations]

**Q:** Could nomad miser also have to pay kyeme shime?

**A:** They didn't give this unless the household had a good number of animals because there was a risk of losing their capital and not getting paid.

**Q:** Were these taxes?

**A:** No. It was called "shed" not tre (tax). Some gave products, but some give money. This wasn't called tax. If one dri was ngüsang 50 (1 dotse). The Nagchuka nomads also had a tax based on 20 nor consisting of one tax unit. For example, you could say that I have 20 dri from Drepung on shed so these are not to be included in the gotsi tax. This was okay to do. Instead they did lebtsi, but were also a little different in that there were taxes even if a person had no animals.